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Summary record of the 54th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 159: Financing of the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (*continued*) (A/52/799 and A/52/825)

Agenda item 136: Financing of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (A/52/772/Add.1 and A/52/817)

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Agenda item 141: Financing of the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti (A/52/798 and A/52/818)

1. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the reports of the Advisory Committee on financing of the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA) (A/52/825); the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) (A/52/817); the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) (A/52/816 and Corr.1); and the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti (UNSMIH), the United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti (UNTMIH) and the United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti (MIPONUH) (A/52/818).

2. In his report on financing of the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (A/52/799), the Secretary-General had requested an increase of $25.7 million over the $155 million gross already appropriated by the General Assembly to cover additional military personnel, military observers and civilian personnel. Of the additional amount requested, $15.4 million was for military personnel costs. The report of the Advisory Committee (A/52/825, paras. 6 and 8) indicated areas where savings were possible. The Advisory Committee was therefore recommending that an additional $20 million, primarily for military personnel costs, should be approved, for a total appropriation of $175 million gross for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998.

3. In his report on financing of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (A/52/772/Add.1), the Secretary-General had proposed increasing the Mission budget from the authorized $7.9 million to $19.9 million in order to cover increases in military observers from 44 to 120, international civilian personnel from 26 to 71 and local staff from 40 to 140, as well as an additional 2 civilian police officers. In response to questions raised by the Advisory Committee concerning the effect of the delay in expansion of the Mission, the Secretariat had reduced its estimate by $3.3 million. The Advisory Committee indicated in its report (A/52/817, paras. 10 and 11) that further savings were possible and recommended that the budget for the period ending 30 June 1998 should not exceed $15 million gross.

4. In his report on financing of United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (A/52/730 and Add.2), the Secretary-General had requested an additional $17.1 million, primarily for the identification process. After considerable discussion, the Advisory Committee was recommending approval of the additional resources.

5. For the reasons contained in its report on financing of the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti, the United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti and the United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti (A/52/818), the Advisory Committee had requested that the budget contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/798) should be resubmitted for review in May 1998. In the meantime, the Secretary-General had been authorized to continue to use the resources already appropriated by the General Assembly and the commitment authority authorized by ACABQ.

6. In its reports on MINURSO, UNMOT, and MONUA, the Advisory Committee drew the attention of the General Assembly to the unencumbered balances reflected in the performance reports for those missions for the period ending 30 June 1997. While the Advisory Committee would comment on those reports in due course, its comments were not likely to affect the level of the amounts shown in the performance reports for credit to Member States. The financial and administrative implications of Security Council decisions concerning those missions would be handled in accordance with the procedure set out in General Assembly resolution 49/233.

7. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) requested a detailed explanation of the MINURSO vacancy rate of 14.5 per cent for international and 13.7 per cent for local staff for the period 1 July 1997 to 31 January 1998 (A/52/816, para. 4). Furthermore, his delegation had been surprised by the statement in paragraph 7 of the ACABQ report that, at the request of the Government of Morocco, discussions were currently under way to open two additional identification centres in northern Morocco. Only nine such centres had been mentioned in the agreements between the two parties and, since there was no political mandate for the establishment of additional centres, his delegation was opposed to the financing thereof. He requested an explanation.

8. **Mr. Wharton** (United States of America) said that his delegation supported the expansion of MINURSO so that the Mission could successfully complete its identification of

potential voters for the upcoming referendum and carry out the demining and other military activities necessary for the deployment of Mission personnel and the movement of refugees. However, he noted with concern the spiralling costs associated with the increased international civilian component and, in particular, the proposal for an additional 176 international staff posts, including an increase from 41 to 123 international General Service staff. The cost of General Service personnel was very high, since they received the same allowances as other international staff but performed functions normally carried out by locally recruited staff members and, although the Secretary-General's report (A/52/730, annex V) attempted to justify their employment, he asked the Secretariat to provide further clarification. The resolution to be adopted by the Committee should request the Secretary-General, in order to reduce the cost of employing General Service staff, to take the necessary steps to employ locally recruited staff commensurate with operational requirements.

9. In addition, his delegation requested that addendum 1 to the report of the Secretary-General on financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (A/52/730/Add.1) and the report of the Secretary-General on financing of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (A/52/772) should be discussed at the current part of the resumed session and that the unencumbered balances of $2,570,300 and $1,507,900 gross, mentioned in paragraphs 8 and 10, respectively, of those reports, should be credited to Member States without further delay.

10. **Mr. Boynton** (United States of America) said that his delegation had questions concerning the entire issue of the unencumbered balances for the various peacekeeping missions and asked the Secretary-General to inform the Committee of any cases in which such balances had not been returned to Member States and to ensure their immediate return.

11. **Mr. Kabir** (Bangladesh), speaking with regard to financing of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan, requested specific information on progress towards demobilization and disarmament in Tajikistan. He wondered why vacancy rates at UNMOT were so high and asked whether that situation affected performance, and, if so, how.

12. **Mr. Thorne** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, enquired about the status of the report on voluntary contributions to UNMOT which the Advisory Committee had undertaken to prepare (A/51/850, para. 12). He also drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the existing groups of Member States for the apportionment of the costs of peacekeeping operations financed through assessed contributions (A/47/484), which provided extremely useful information on changes in the composition of the groups, and asked the Secretariat to prepare an updated report.

13. **Mr. Watanabe** (Japan) extended his condolences to the victims of the recent helicopter crash in which nine members of the United Nations Human Rights Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) had been killed or wounded and to the families and colleagues of those who had died.

14. His delegation attached great importance to the activities of the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti since the political stability of that country was a key element in the peace and prosperity of the region. While his delegation regretted the need for increased financing, it understood that changing conditions could require such an increase and was prepared to meet its payment obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, provided that the necessary requirements for accountability were met. His delegation therefore concurred in the Advisory Committee's request for revised estimates. Nevertheless, he wondered how the situation that had prompted that request had arisen.

15. **Ms. Emerson** (Portugal), speaking with regard to the high vacancy rate at MINURSO, asked the Secretariat to explain whether the international staff employed at the Mission were actually performing the tasks for which they had been recruited.

16. **Mr. Medina** (Morocco), said that he had taken note of the remarks made by another delegation concerning the statement in the report of the Advisory Committee on financing of MINURSO (A/52/816, para. 7) that two additional identification centres might be opened in northern Morocco. He emphasized that the Fifth Committee was authorized to comment only on the financial and administrative aspects of political decisions taken by competent bodies.

17. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that the representative of Morocco's remark was irrelevant. The fact that the statement in question was contained in the report of the Advisory Committee entitled the Committee to comment on it. There was no legal, political or financial basis for the opening of additional identity centres which were not mentioned in the relevant agreements and arrangements. The most recent Security Council resolutions and the report of the Secretary-General consistently spoke of nine such centres, and the Fifth Committee could only agree to the financing

of what had been politically mandated. He asked the Secretariat to provide further information.

18. **Mr. Yeo Bock Cheng** (Peacekeeping Operations Financing Division) said that the Secretariat had recently reviewed the use of internationally recruited General Service staff for all peacekeeping missions and had indicated in each of the Secretary-General's reports whether some of those staff members could be replaced with locally recruited personnel. The question of the unencumbered balances in the peacekeeping mission budgets would be discussed at greater length in informal consultations. He would transmit the European Union's request for an update to the report on the composition of the existing groups of Member States for the apportionment of the cost of peacekeeping operations financed through assessed contributions (A/47/484) to the Department of Management for appropriate action.

19. In reply to the representative of Japan's question concerning the need for revised budget estimates for the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti, he explained that the situation had been complicated by the fact that the Security Council had authorized a series of short-term extensions to, and amendments of, the Mission's mandate. The Secretary-General had already submitted one revised budget, which had been rendered immediately obsolete by Security Council action. The Advisory Committee had asked the Secretary-General to resubmit his budget because some of the amounts contained therein were open to question as a result of delays in the recording of field accounts and mistaken charging of some expenses against voluntary rather than assessed contributions. The report of the Advisory Committee (A/52/818) mentioned serious staff shortages in the Secretariat; in fact, the problem stemmed from a high level of staff turnover at both Headquarters and the Mission which had resulted in additional delays. The Secretariat was in the process of submitting a new revised budget.

20. **Mr. Persaud** (Chief, Finance Management and Support Service, Field Administration and Logistics Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations) said that the high vacancy rate at UNMOT was due to the fact that the Mission operated under very difficult conditions on account of the lack of security in many parts of the country. The deployment of administrative support staff had therefore been kept to a minimum and would remain so until such time as the Government of Tajikistan could guarantee safer conditions. The absence of operational staff naturally had an adverse impact on the Mission's operations. Such staff as were deployed were obliged to work seven days a week to provide support for the military observers. Discussions were continuing with the Government on the matter and he hoped that urgent measures could be taken to provide a safer working environment and thereby permit the full deployment of staff.

21. The information contained in paragraph 7 of the report of ACABQ (A/52/816) that two additional centres were to be opened in northern Morocco was misleading. The centres referred to were in fact annexes to existing centres which were operational from time to time. At no time, however, would the total number of centres be more than nine. He would address the other issues raised in informal consultations.

22. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) welcomed the explanation given by the Secretariat that two additional centres were not being established in northern Morocco but that mobile teams from existing centres would be sent out to conduct identification exercises. He noted that the total number of identification centres would remain at nine.

Agenda item 142: Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations (*continued*) (A/C.5/52/38)

23. **Mr. Gilpin** (Chief, Contributions Service) introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 49/249 and 50/224 (A/C.5/52/38), drew attention to the provisions for the movement of Belarus, Greece, Portugal and Ukraine to groups C, B, B and C, respectively. Notwithstanding the references contained in the resolutions to equal dollar increases and reductions for Portugal/Belarus and Greece/Ukraine, respectively, it was the Secretariat's view that it was the intent of the Assembly to reduce the assessments of Belarus and Ukraine to group C levels only as those reductions were offset by increases in the assessments of Portugal and Greece, and that it was not the Assembly's intent that the assessments of Belarus and Ukraine should be below those that would otherwise apply to them as members of group C.

24. On that basis, the peacekeeping assessments for Belarus in 1998 had been calculated at the full rate normal for group C, with the balance of Portugal's increase being reflected in the relative overall share of group A in the usual way. The Secretary-General intended to apply the same approach to Greece and Ukraine in future, should the same situation arise.

25. **Mr. Varso** (Slovakia) said that he hoped that the Committee could in informal consultations agree on the text of a draft resolution which would address Slovakia's concerns and facilitate its transition to group C.

26. **The Chairman** suggested that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it should take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 49/249 and 50/224 (A/C.5/52/38).

27. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 116: Programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (*continued*) (A/C.5/52/L.24)

Draft decision A/C.5/52/L.24

28. **Mr. Riva** (Argentina) introduced draft decision A/C.5/52/L.24 on the reduction and refocusing of non-programme costs. He drew attention to an editorial revision of the Spanish version of the text to align it with the English version, and hoped that the draft could be adopted by consensus.

29. **Mr. Ahounou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that his delegation would have liked to have made a number of suggestions concerning the draft decision, but had not been consulted during its preparation. Despite its reservations, however, and so as not to delay the Committee's work, his delegation was prepared to join the consensus.

30. **The Chairman** recalled that the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China had indicated that the Group was not ready to take a decision on the Secretary-General's report (A/52/758) at the first part of the resumed session. It was on that basis that the draft before the Committee had been prepared.

31. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) said that, as Chairman of the Group of 77 and China, he wished to confirm the Chairman's recollection.

32. **Ms. Achouri** (Tunisia) supported the statement by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China. She also wished to draw attention to the need for an editorial change to be made in the French version of the draft decision similar to the one suggested by the representative of Argentina for the Spanish version.

33. **The Chairman** said that the editorial changes suggested would be reflected in the final versions of the respective language texts.

34. *Draft decision A/C.5/52/L.24 was adopted.*

35. **Mr. Watanabe** (Japan) said that although the Committee had had to defer consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the reduction and refocusing of non-programme costs (A/52/758), a decision on the exact modalities and procedures of the development account must be taken as soon as possible so that the Secretariat could prepare the budget outline for the next biennium. His delegation regretted that the Committee had not been able to discuss the concept of non-programme costs and the Advisory Committee's suggestions concerning a new mechanism for the development account in informal consultations; the Secretariat should take note of the views expressed by Member States. He hoped that the Committee would be able to come to an agreement on the issue of the development account at the second part of the resumed session.

36. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that although the Group had concurred in the deferment of consideration of the reduction and refocusing of non-programme costs, it urged the Secretary-General to submit a clear, legitimate concept of these costs and of methodologies for calculating the percentage thereof so that the Committee could take a decision on the matter in the context of the establishment of the development account. He hoped that the Secretary-General, in preparing his next report, would take the views expressed by the Group of 77 and China into consideration.

37. **Mr. Thorne** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that, while the European Union had reluctantly acquiesced in deferment of consideration of the Secretary-General's report, its proposals still remained on the table and he hoped that the Secretary-General would take them into account.

38. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that before taking a decision her delegation would have preferred to have had the information it had earlier requested on possible reductions in cost, the number of posts proposed for elimination and their corresponding areas of work, and the measures that would be taken to rationalize tasks.

Draft decision A/C.5/52/L.23

39. **Ms. Goicochea Estenoz** (Cuba) said that paragraph (c) of draft decision A/C.5/52/L.23, concerning office accommodation at the Palais Wilson, should specify that the United Nations share of the cost of the move would be covered from resources under section 27F of the budget, since the current formulation seemed to question the budget process established in General Assembly resolution 41/213. Paragraph (e) should be reformulated to read, "*Requests* the Secretary-General to entrust to the Office of Internal Oversight Services the task of submitting to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session a cost-benefit analysis on the use of the conference rooms at the disposal of the United Nations in Geneva". A new paragraph should then be added: "*Decides* to consider the proposal to build two

additional conference rooms at the Palais Wilson in the light of the above-mentioned report". It was necessary to add that paragraph because there was no point in requesting a cost-benefit analysis if the decision to build the additional conference rooms had already been taken.

40. She also proposed the addition of another new paragraph in which the Assembly would decide to consider, at its fifty-fourth session, the issue of the space which might become available as a result of the decision taken by the Assembly on the future of the Division of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Such a paragraph was necessary because the current provisional arrangements only covered the period up to the end of 1999.

41. **Mr. Fermín** (Dominican Republic) said that he supported the proposals put forward by the representative of Cuba.

42. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that paragraph (b) of the draft decision did not accurately reflect the Committee's concerns about the arrangements for the move to the Palais Wilson. The beginning of the paragraph should therefore be changed to read, "*Accepts* the proposal of the Secretary-General regarding the offer of the Swiss authorities". In paragraph (c), the assertion that "the balance of 1,959,000 dollars would be covered from existing resources available for the provision of accommodation at Geneva" was too vague. Instead, the language which the Controller had used in explaining the situation should be inserted. Lastly, the word "*Urges*" in paragraph (d) was too strong, considering that the Swiss authorities had made a generous offer. A more suitable expression should be used instead. He regretted having had to express those concerns at that meeting, but he had not been privy to the consultations held by the Chairman on the draft decision.

43. **The Chairman** said that the only consultations on the draft decision had been the ones held at the last formal meeting on the subject. The language of paragraphs (b) and (c) had been taken verbatim from the oral report by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee. The Controller had reviewed the current wording of paragraph (c) and had confirmed that it reflected the situation accurately. However, if the Ugandan delegation still was not satisfied, the Cuban delegation's proposal to include a reference to budget section 27F might address its concerns. A revised version of the draft decision would be issued following informal consultations.

44. **Mr. Thorne** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that he was satisfied with the current text of the draft decision. Although he did not object to the Cuban delegation's proposed changes to paragraphs (c) and (e), he wondered why a cost-benefit analysis was necessary, since it was his understanding that the facilities at Petit Saconnex would no longer be available and that the Palais Wilson was therefore the only alternative. He could not, however, support the two proposed new paragraphs, since the first one would have the effect of holding up the construction work taking place at the Palais Wilson and the second one involved a question of micro-management that should be left to the Secretariat. He would like information from the Secretariat on the probable impact of a decision by the Committee to hold up the construction of the proposed additional conference rooms at the Palais Wilson.

45. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the original target date of March or April 1998 for occupancy of the Palais Wilson had already been postponed to 1 July 1998 as a result of the delays in obtaining the Committee's approval for the move. Further postponement of construction work would result in a further delay, probably of at least two more months.

46. **Ms. Goicochea Estenoz** (Cuba) said that the closure of the Petit Saconnex annex was completely unrelated to the issue of additional conference rooms, since the existing conference facilities in Geneva were located not at Petit Saconnex, but at the Palais des Nations. Under the budget for the current biennium, the General Assembly had allocated resources for all United Nations meetings in Geneva on the understanding that the meetings would be held at the Palais des Nations. Therefore, from a technical standpoint, the Committee was justified in requesting a cost-benefit analysis. That request would postpone only the construction of new conference rooms, not the move to the Palais Wilson.

Agenda item 119: Pattern of conferences *(continued)*
(A/52/829)

47. **The Chairman** recalled that, at the Committee's fiftieth meeting, a number of delegations had referred to the question of the two major Islamic holidays and had sought clarification with regard to the interpretation of the provisions of paragraphs 5 and 6 of General Assembly resolution 52/214 A.

48. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that she was not in a position to advise the Committee on how to solve the matter of the two holidays. Instead, she would be guided by the Committee's decision.

49. From a legal point of view, it was for the General Assembly to determine the total number of holidays that staff should have in a calendar year. However, rule 101.3 of

the Staff Regulations and Rules provided that the Secretary-General should set the official holidays for each duty station. In accordance with paragraph (a) of regulation 8.1, the Secretary-General was required to ensure the effective participation of the staff in his decision, since the issue was related to the welfare of the staff. The Secretary-General had complied with the provisions of paragraphs 5 and 6 of resolution 52/214 A, which required that the Headquarters building should be closed to the public and that no meetings should be held on the days in question. Faced with the limitation of a total of nine staff holidays, the Secretary-General had declared the holidays of Good Friday and Id al-Adha optional, since no existing holidays were to be replaced. In so doing, he believed that he had complied with the intent and purpose of the resolution. The basis of the Secretary-General's decision was that, as far as possible, holidays should coincide with those of the spouses and children of staff in order to preserve the sanctity of family life. There was no other reason for the decision. However, the Secretary-General's decision would be rendered easier and more workable if the Committee were to recommend to the General Assembly that Id al-Adha should be declared a tenth staff holiday. The matter was thus in the Committee's hands.

50. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for the clarification she had provided with regard to the Islamic holidays and reiterated his delegation's concern over the issue. General Assembly resolution 52/214, paragraph 5, gave the Secretariat sufficient grounds for observing the Islamic holidays in exactly the same manner as other holidays. However, the Secretariat had only added the two holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha to the list of holidays in theory. When paragraph 5 had been proposed, at the fifty-second session, it had been understood that its wording was sufficient to ensure that those two holidays would be fully observed. He agreed with the Assistant Secretary-General that it was difficult to reconcile international and local holidays; nevertheless, it must be remembered that the United Nations was an international organization. He requested a response from the Secretariat to the question asked by the representative of Uganda regarding the right of staff representatives to hold a referendum on a resolution adopted by the General Assembly. He refuted the statement made by the staff representative in that connection as incorrect. He stressed the need for transparency in the submission of information on the matter to the Fifth Committee. His delegation did not find it acceptable that the decision on holidays should be left to the staff, since everyone should celebrate the Islamic holidays in the same way as they celebrated Christmas, for example, because it was an international holiday. Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha should also be considered official international holidays, especially given the fact that there were 45 Islamic countries at the United Nations.

51. **The Chairman** urged members of the Committee to focus on ways of resolving the problem and to refrain from restating positions which were already well known. One concrete suggestion was that the total number of holidays in the calendar year should be increased from 9 to 10. Other specific suggestions would be welcome.

52. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia), responding to the statement made by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, said that he did not consider that the Secretary-General had fully complied with the provisions of resolution 52/214 A. A new circular should be issued in which Id al-Adha was classified as an official non-optional holiday. His delegation would be willing to consider increasing the total number of holidays to 10. In the meantime, however, the date of the Id al-Adha holiday was fast approaching and it was imperative that it should be observed in the manner mandated by the resolution.

53. **Mr. Ahounou** (Côte d'Ivoire) wished to know whether it was for the Secretariat or the General Assembly to decide on an increase in the number of holidays. If it was within the competence of the General Assembly to decide, then it might be possible for the Assembly to propose that a tenth holiday should be added in order to meet the concerns of Islamic Member States. He would welcome clarification from the Secretariat on the matter.

54. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he supported the proposal to increase to 10 the number of holidays.

55. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that, as a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Uganda shared the concerns of other delegations with regard to the observance of the holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha. In seeking a solution to the problem, however, the Organization must be very careful not to play one religion off against another. He noted in that connection that Good Friday had been declared an optional holiday, which might create additional problems.

56. The United Nations was an international organization representing 185 Member States and the concern to ensure that United Nations holidays coincided with local holidays at the Headquarters duty station, though deserving of some consideration, should not be a determining factor. His delegation wished to suggest either increasing the total

number of holidays to 10 or making any of the non-religious local holidays optional.

57. **Mr. Monayair** (Kuwait) said that the discussion about holidays had taken up an undue amount of time, despite the fact that the resolution was extremely clear. He welcomed the proposal to increase to 10 the number of holidays, on condition that it was done by consensus without referring the issue to consultations.

58. **The Chairman** said that, as far as he was aware, it had been decided to address Id al-Fitr first because that holiday fell in January.

59. **Ms. Aragon** (Philippines) said that she supported the proposal to increase the number of official staff holidays to 10.

60. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that, in view of the concerns expressed by delegations with respect to the implementation of paragraphs 5 and 6 of General Assembly resolution 52/214, she supported the views expressed by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

61. **Mr. Lozinski** (Russian Federation) said that it was important to recall the discussions held and the agreement reached at the time of the draft resolution's adoption in December 1997. He asked the Secretariat to provide all delegations with copies of the summary record of the relevant Fifth Committee meeting.

62. **Ms. Achouri** (Tunisia) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management for the clarification she had provided, and said that her delegation supported the statements made by the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, Uganda and Kuwait. She did not think it necessary for the discussion to take a religious turn or debate the priority that should be given to Islamic, Christian, Jewish or other holidays. Her delegation supported the proposal made by the representative of Uganda, and considered that there were two possible ways around the problem. One way was to increase to 10 the number of official holidays. The other was to consider the Islamic holidays as two of the nine official holidays of the United Nations, but to leave the choice to the staff with respect to United States national holidays.

63. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) said that he also supported the Ugandan delegation's proposal to increase the number of staff holidays to 10.

64. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that the distribution of the summary record of the meeting at which the draft resolution had been adopted would only complicate matters. He, too, supported the proposal to increase the number of staff holidays to 10.

65. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said he agreed that the distribution of the summary record would not represent a constructive approach. He shared the views expressed by the delegations that supported full compliance with General Assembly resolution 52/214, and therefore supported the proposal to increase the number of staff holidays to 10.

66. **Mr. Kabir** (Bangladesh) said that, of the two proposals made by the Ugandan delegation, he preferred the proposal to approve one additional staff holiday. However, if that proposal encountered difficulties, the Committee should consider the proposal that one of the local holidays should be made optional.

67. **Mr. Wharton** (United States of America) said that he was well aware of the sensitivity of the issue, which had been discussed at length the previous year. However, the approval of a tenth staff holiday would have budgetary implications which must be fully explored, particularly in view of the Organization's current efforts to enhance its efficiency. The wording of resolution 52/214 had intentionally been left vague because no clear-cut decision had been reached as to how paragraphs 5 and 6 were to be implemented. The proposal to add another holiday should therefore be discussed thoroughly in informal consultations. If the Committee were to vote on the proposal immediately, his delegation would vote against it.

68. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for the information she had provided, and said that her delegation considered that the only proper way to implement the General Assembly resolution was to increase to 10 the number of official holidays. She emphasized the need to respect all the concerns of Member States.

69. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic), responding to the statement made by the representative of the United States, said that increasing by one the number of holidays would have no budgetary implications, but would reduce the work of the staff. He asked that representative to reconsider the proposal to increase the number of holidays, in view of the support it enjoyed from the overwhelming majority of delegations.

70. **Mr. Thorne** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the Committee had known, when it adopted the draft resolution, that it was essentially handing over to the Secretariat the responsibility for what was not an easy decision. The proposal to add a tenth staff holiday was not acceptable to the European Union at the current stage.

71. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that the current discussion illustrated, once again, that the Committee could not enhance its efficiency or effectiveness unless it established a clearly defined decision-making process.

72. **Mr. Ahounou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that, if the United States of America and the European Union could not accept the proposal to add a tenth staff holiday, they might consider the Ugandan delegation's other proposal, to the effect that Id al-Adha could replace one of the host-country holidays.

73. **Mr. Hanson** (Canada) said that he could not see how the Secretary-General could have devised a solution other than the one he had proposed, since the Assembly had essentially decided that nine holidays, plus two, minus zero, must still equal nine. He asked the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management to confirm whether the Secretary-General, in consultation with the staff, had the authority to decide which days would be observed as official staff holidays at each duty station.

74. **Mr. Paguaga** (Nicaragua) said that, although he was aware of the Organization's budgetary problems, he was also aware of the importance of cultural values, including religious values. His delegation would therefore vote in favour of adding a tenth holiday to be observed by staff throughout the Organization.

75. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that, under the current Staff Regulations and Rules, as approved by the General Assembly, the decision as to which holidays would be observed at each duty station was the prerogative of the Secretary-General, although the General Assembly determined the total number of holidays. In response to the concerns expressed regarding productivity and financial issues, she suggested that, if a tenth staff holiday was approved, the staff could make up the eight working hours lost by working an extra half hour for a period of 16 working days at some point during the year.

76. **Ms. Chen Yue** (China) said that, although her delegation could not decide immediately on the proposal to add a tenth staff holiday, it would give positive consideration to the proposal.

77. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that General Assembly resolution 52/214 was not ambiguous, as some delegations had claimed. It specified clearly that the holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha must be observed. The Committee should give serious consideration to the suggestion made by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management.

78. **Mr. Dvinyanin** (Russian Federation) said that the proposal to offset an additional staff holiday by adding another 30 minutes to 16 working days during busy periods might send an undesirable message to observers outside the Organization. The summary record of the meeting at which the draft resolution had been adopted would show that the decision to observe the Islamic holidays had been made on the understanding that no financial implications would be involved. The Secretary-General had been authorized to determine precisely which days would be official holidays.

79. **The Chairman** said that he would instruct the Secretariat to distribute the relevant summary record.

80. **Mr. Thorne** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that despite the eminently pragmatic and sensible nature of the suggestion made by the Assistant Secretary-General, the Committee should not be under the impression that the European Union endorsed it. The United Nations must be seen to steer a middle course between different opinions and groups. If the Organization were to make special arrangements to accommodate the wishes of a particular constituency, other groups with equally strong views on certain topics would be justified in asking for their demands to be met.

81. **Ms. Achouri** (Tunisia) said that the second proposal made by the representative of Uganda remained on the table, namely that two local holidays should be sacrificed to the two Islamic religious holidays.

82. **The Chairman** said that the Assistant Secretary-General had merely made her suggestion as a possible way out of the dilemma. The suggestion should not be imputed to her personally, and in any event it was incumbent on delegations to weigh up the various alternatives and reach a decision.

83. **Ms. Chen Yue** (China) said that, with regard to providing the necessary resources for the upgrading of conference rooms and interpretation booths, all upgrading of conference facilities must be done in a timely fashion. The Secretary-General's report in document A/52/829 stated that some work was being done, but she wished to draw the Secretariat's attention to the fact that one set of interpretation equipment was missing from the Chinese interpreters' booths in the Economic and Social Council chamber. Her delegation also endorsed previous comments by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding documentation for the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The material for that conference had only been issued in English, French and Spanish. The Assistant Secretary-General for General

Assembly Affairs and Conference Services should provide more information to address her delegation's concerns.

84. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) proposed that informal consultations should be recorded so that the political thrust of agreed resolutions would not subsequently be diluted or misinterpreted. With reference to a point raised by her delegation at the previous meeting on the lack of interpretation at a recent meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, which had resulted in decisions being taken without the use of all the official languages, the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services should explain whether any backup systems existed to ensure that such a situation would not reoccur.

85. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names had traditionally adopted its own rules of procedure specifying that its official languages would be the six official languages of the United Nations, but that its working languages would be English, French and Spanish. The Secretariat merely followed the instructions of the Conference itself. His Department naturally regretted the one occasion on which interpretation had not been provided to the Commission on the Status of Women, which had occurred because the Commission had not requested additional conference resources until very late in the evening on the final day of its session.

86. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for the sterling endeavours that had been made with respect to the documents for the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, and requested a copy of his statement. With regard to the working languages to be used, he said that the Conference itself had adopted rules of procedure specifying that all six United Nations official languages should be official languages at the Conference. The Fifth Committee could only adopt a resolution on the translation of the documents issued by the secretariat of the Conference, not the documents submitted by Member States.

87. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that, although the recent problem with the Commission on the Status of Women was largely attributable to a lack of planning on the part of the Commission itself, her delegation would like details on contingency mechanisms which the Secretariat had put in place to forestall such lapses.

88. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General, Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that the key to effective provision of conference services was anticipating the needs of an intergovernmental body as far ahead as possible. The bureaux of such bodies must make a realistic assessment of their needs and book services well in advance, bearing in mind that his Department was flexible up to a point in terms of the volume of work it could handle.

89. **Ms. Chen Yue** (China) said that the answers provided by the Secretariat had gone some way towards addressing her delegation's concerns. Her delegation would put forward specific proposals on the working languages of intergovernmental conferences at a later stage.

90. **Mr. Dvinyanin** (Russian Federation) said that documents issued by the Secretariat frequently contained substantive mistranslations, which was obviously a source of concern. For example, in paragraph 11 (a) of the letter dated 5 March 1998 from the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China addressed to the Secretary-General (A/52/820), the English word "reduction" had been rendered in Russian as "reimbursement".

91. **The Chairman** said that delegations should approach him with suggestions for a draft decision on upgrading conference rooms and interpretation booths, possibly authorizing the use of the unspent balance of $1.3 million from the previous biennium and specifying that the work should be completed within a certain time-frame.

92. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation had received no response to its query about press releases, a matter which had been raised by several delegations. The press releases issued after the previous meeting had not included everything that his delegation had said on the issue of the proposed Code of Conduct. Press releases should be prepared using the language in which statements had been made rather than the interpretation.

93. **Mr. Parker** (Office of Communications and Public Information) said that the Office of Communications and Public Information had now overcome the technical problem with regard to the numbering of English and French press releases. The problem went back 10 years to a time when English texts were standard and there were very few French press releases. From 1999 the English and French versions would be synchronized. A further problem was that some agencies in the United Nations system issued press releases in one language only; such documents would be issued under a special symbol. Press officers could only work in English and French. It was impossible to operate in other languages owing to financial constraints. Meetings were covered by an English-speaking and a French-speaking team; they consulted with each other but did not write exactly the same text. Delegations should feel free to approach the press

officers or the Office of Communications and Public Information if they detected inaccuracies.

94. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that a representative of the Secretariat should be present at the informal consultations on the matter to be held by the Committee.

95. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) asked for an update on the plan to publish press releases on the Internet in all six official languages.

96. **The Chairman** reminded the Committee that press releases were not official records. It was very important for the press officers assigned to cover meetings of the Fifth Committee to be experienced professionals who were familiar with the specialized terminology involved. The principal requirement was to record the evolving character of the debate, which would also help the press to form an accurate picture of the work of the Fifth Committee. Since the Fifth Committee was an intergovernmental forum, it sometimes seemed that press releases were skewed towards the views of delegations rather than those of the Secretariat. It was therefore important to strike the correct balance.

97. **Mr. Parker** (Office of Communications and Public Information) said that he would be glad to attend the relevant informal consultations of the Committee. The press officers were the best that the Organization could recruit, and the best of them were assigned to cover meetings of the Fifth Committee owing to the complexity of the material. The Office of Communications and Public Information had started to issue background material and round-ups of the work of the Fifth Committee on the Internet, and he assured the Committee that equal weight would be given to the views of Member States and the Secretariat. Regarding the status of the plan to post press releases on the Internet, he did not possess sufficient knowledge or expertise to provide a detailed answer to the representative of Algeria at the present time.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.